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ABSTRACT

This paper notes that gifted education has been dominated by psychology and proposes, in contrast, to de-psychologize the concept of "giftedness-at-risk" with an alternative model which sees ontological giftedness, becoming the best one can be, as not the property of an elite few but a permanent positive human possibility for all. Hermeneutics is applied to the problem of the gifted underachiever, seen as the paradigm of giftedness-at-risk. The concept of "at risk" is seen to have its origins in ideas of insurance, resulting in technical educational efforts to reduce risk factors and descriptions of gifted students in terms of dehumanized qualities such as IQ scores and discrepancy data. Being "at risk" is redefined to include not only increased vulnerability but also increased access to new possibilities for human fulfillment. A dialogue with one underachieving gifted adolescent illustrates the importance of trust and disclosure for the pedagogical relationship as well as the need for teachers to be enthusiastically engaged with both the curriculum and students. (Contains 33 references.) (DB)

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WHEN GIFTEDNESS PUTS THE CHILD AT RISK: BEING-AT-RISK AS A WAY OF DWELLING IN POSSIBILITIES FOR GIFTEDNESS

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to contribute to the spirit of community within education by opening a space for dialogue about giftedness-at-risk. Dialogue engages different voices that share commitments on a topic of mutual interest but speak of them in different ways. The difficulty here is that one voice, psychology, has historically dominated gifted education. In this paper I de-psychologize giftedness-at-risk in a hermeneutic turn to understanding being-at-risk not as a problem to solve but as a way of dwelling in possibilities for giftedness. The metaphor of the Hermes-world frames this interpretive inquiry. The ancient Greeks recognized the spirit of risk in the world and named that mischievous spirit Hermes. I argue that being-at-home with the riskiness of live and making one's own the gifts that life presents, reveals the ontological transformations of becoming gifted. Ontological giftedness, becoming the best one can be, is not the property of an elite few but a permanent positive *human* possibility for all persons.

WHEN GIFTEDNESS PUTS THE CHILD AT RISK:

BEING-AT-RISK AS A WAY OF DWELLING IN POSSIBILITIES FOR GIFTEDNESS

I am pleased to be speaking about the important topic of giftedness-at-risk. I am also aware that I am in a wonderfully risky position. There is something wonderfully risky about speaking in a session of the Canadian Association of Educational Psychology when I intend to de-psychologize the meaning of giftedness-at-risk. Beattie (1989), moreover, suggests that conference presenters are "permitted--perhaps obliged--to be provocative" (p. 23) in identifying challenges, in the legitimate hope that subsequent discussions will provide insights into how to deal with them. The root of the word provocative is *voce*, "voice," which turns attention to *dialogue* as the human way in which people come together for the purpose of coming to a *different* understanding of a topic of mutual interest. I hope to contribute across paradigm boundaries to building the spirit of community within education by opening a space for dialogue about giftedness-at-risk. Seen in this light, my joining this panel might well be viewed as an event of mutual risk taking.

Dialogue moves forward by engaging different voices while acknowledging the possibility of "shared commitments, in spite of the fact that such commitments may be spoken of in quite different sorts of ways" (Smith, 1989, p. 136). This is a challenging task insofar as gifted education has historically been defined within the paradigm

boundary of psychology-educational psychology. Alvino (1983) states that "we only talk to ourselves" and "little effort is made in integrating other disciplines into our *understanding* of gifted education" (p. 2). As a result, membership within gifted education tends to be exclusive and univocal. There is no *other* voice.

Hermeneutics provides a pedagogically other voice in a dialogue about giftedness-at-risk. The roots of hermeneutics can be traced to ancient Greece. Hermeneutics is named for the god Hermes who invented language as the medium of human existence. Hermes, however, is the quintessential trickster. Living in language requires the arts of interpretation, or hermeneutics. The need for the practice of hermeneutics is pointed up in a quote from Langer (1980):

> Every word has a history...And through all the metamorphoses of its meaning, such a word carries a certain trace of every meaning it has ever had, like an overtone, and every association it has acquired, like an aura, so that in living language practically no word is a purely conventional counter...Its meaning depends partly on social convention, and partly on its history, its past company, even on the "natural symbolism: or suggestiveness of its sound. (p. 282)

Hermeneutics has a long history in the humanities. Aristotle (384-322 BC) wrote a treatise on hermeneutics. Principles of text interpretation were developed in the seventeenth century around the translation and exegesis of religious texts. In the nineteenth century, hermeneutics turned to the interpretation of texts of lived

experience. At the end of the twentieth century, hermeneutics has become the "common idiom of both philosophy and culture" (Vattimo, 1988, p. 399). The current prominence of hermeneutics can be read as a desire "to provoke new ways of seeing and thinking within a deep sense of tradition, bringing about new forms of engagement and dialogue about the world we face together" (Smith, 1991, p. 202). I plan to speak about giftedness-at-risk not as a problem to solve but as a way of dwelling in possibilities for giftedness.

Listening for the Sounds of Silence in the Language of Giftedness-at-Risk

According to Vacca and Padak (1990), the familiar way of speaking about students who are at-risk can best be understood through an insurance metaphor. At-risk refers to the probability of loss to the insurer. For example, when a person is designated as high risk this reflects the insurer's conclusion that the probability of loss to the insurer is great in relation to that person. Vacca and Padak comment that "for various reasons, some students might be considered high risks in terms of probable school success and achievement. Schools, like insurers, recognize the possibility of loss--only the loss is not measured in dollars abut rather in human potential" (p. 487). "The at-risk concept," they believe, "has unleashed a burst of energy onto the educational landscape, and with it a hope and commitment, channeled toward reversing

the personal and societal hazards of low achievement and school failure" (p. 386). In attempting to limit losses, attention turns to reductionist abstractions and technical methodologies in an effort to identify and isolate risk factors and properties of students-at-risk. Schools then provide special programs to reduce or eliminate such risks.

Equating being at-risk with being in-harm's-way works particularly well as the current ethos of gifted education where the newest at-risk category is giftedness-at-risk. Padak (1991) points out that "*exceptional* children...whether they are physically or developmentally handicapped, learning disabled, or gifted have been described as at-risk when their achievement is not commensurate with their abilities" (p. 496). It is taken-for-granted that giftedness is a gold mine of latent potential, a valuable natural resource to be exploited for the good of self and society. Gifted students are frequently called the "talent pool" or "cultural capital." Galagher (1990) states:

> The basic idea presented here is that gifted individuals through their work can expand the total pool of resources available to us all with their creations and discoveries. If we can encourage more of such activity through special educational programs, then we will all have more resources available, even if they are not totally equally distributed. That, anyway, is the rationale for the free enterprise system of the uses of intellect and talent. (p. 286)

The paradigm case of giftedness-at-risk is the gifted underachiever.

The literature resounds with technical language that gives rise to professional

ways of acting with cool detachment toward gifted underachievers. The language that is used to discuss gifted underachievers reveals objective terminology and reductionist abstractions. We frequently operationalize giftedness in terms of high IQ. We classify children as gifted if their IQ scores are above 120 or 130, or whatever cutoff score we happen to choose. We then determine underachievement in terms of discrepancy criteria. For example, Cindy, is a 12-year-old with a plus 130 IQ. Her very superior IQ is used as a way of operationalizing giftedness. According to a discrepancy table (Richet, List, & Lerner, 1983) that assumes a direct correlation between IQ and achievment, although Cindy is in Grade 7 she has a reading expectancy of Grade 9. As a result, because Cindy's school marks and reading comprehension are at the Grade 7 level, she demonstrates a two-year discrepancy between potential and achievement. Cindy is, therefore, labelled a gifted underachiever.

Cindy attends a junior high school implementing an approach to gifted education based on the Renzulli and associates' Triad/Revolving Door Identification Model (Renzulli, Reis, & Smith, 1981). Probably no other approach to gifted education in recent memory, observes Jarell and Borland (1990), has generated "as much interest or debate" and "certainly, one has had as profound an impact on educational practice...and has resulted in the widespread adoption of an identification scheme and an instruction model...derived from this conception" (p. 289). In this model students are ranked on the basis of above average intelligence, creativity, and task commitment and the top 20% of

the school population are grouped as the Talent Pool. On the evidence of productive behaviors, students in the Talent Pool identify themselves as ready to revolve into the resource room for enrichment. Before Cindy is allowed to participate in enrichment she must demonstrate that she is ready to perform at levels commensurate with her potential. The "insurers" are concerned about the loss or waste of that gifted potential. It is assumed that Cindy is at-risk not only for school failure but also at-risk for failure to achieve later in life.

We need to consider more closely what comes into being when the dominant voice in gifted education treats the mysteries of giftedness and risk as if they were objects to technically manipulate to reduce liabilities. Otto (1990), a provocative educational writer in the reading community, observes that in education we can sometimes be helped to understand our own work differently by listening in on what is happening in other lines of work. Otto refers to a recent essay in *Harper's Magazine* entitled, "The Rehumanization the Heart" (February, 1990), as "a kind of lamentation, a piece that mourns the diminishment of the hearts' subtleties and spiritual significance in the face of heart specialists' ostensibly greater scientific knowledge" (Siebert in Otto, p. 212). Siebert argues that when doctors talk about the human heart as just a pump, a replaceable commodity, "they demystify it; they reduce a once profound source of mystery and misgiving to a mere machine" (p. 212). In managing to demystify the wondrous human heart, we have lost something. Along with this medical reductionism

we have been dehumanized. In response to this loss, Siebert says, contemporary humanity suffers from "a kind of collective heart attack," pain brought about by the "weakening of long-held notions of the heart as the home of the soul and the seat of deep emotions" (p. 212). Otto argues there is something Frankensteinian about approaching the mysteries of life as if they were objects to technically manipulate solely according to our own designs. Is there also something Frankensteinian about the concept of gifted underachiever? With the best of intentions have we created a monster?

Facing the Monster

Gadamer (1989) points out there is in hermeneutics a fundamental pedagogical desire. This means that from the hermeneutic standpoint, opening ourselves to the possibility that we have created a monster presents an interpretive opportunity for understanding how our history and culture are at work in shaping our taken-for-granted reality. The word monster,

> is related to *demonstrate* and to *remonstrate*, and ultimately comes from the Latin *monstrum*, an omen portending the will of the gods, which is itself linked to the verb *monere*, to warn...Monsters, therefore, were created to teach lessons. And they can still be pedagogical--even in an age that no longer believes in the gods

or their messengers. (Chua-Eoan, 1991, p. 27)

We often look to our poets and storytellers to explore questions of the meanings of lived experience. They are frequently less caught up in theorizing and dreaming of purely rational progress and therefore more likely to remind us of our earth-bound existence and of the limitations of such dreams.

Goethe's (1954) *Faust* carries such a message. Faust can be read as a story of human efforts to capture and bottle the essence of genius. In exchange for his soul, Faust makes a deal with Mephistopheles to experience the "ultimate reality." What is revealed instead is something monstrous, a "counterfeit reality." This counterfeit reality is Homunculus, a creature of science. Homunculus appears as a diminutive man crouching in a glass bottle. Homunculus is "pure intellect but without human qualities...since the bottle constitutes its existence" (Schradt, 1975, p. 84). What Goethe leads us to understand is that the first need of living here on Earth for the disembodied bottle-imp is a body–the undoing of the process of decontextualization and abstraction of the essence of genius.

Like Faust, we too have forfeited the soul of giftedness and the spirit of risk in the world for a counterfeit reality. We have reified the scientific abstraction of genius, a decontextualized essence of intellect without human qualities, in the concept of the gifted underachiever. Consider for a moment that the language we use to talk about Cindy is a technical rather than a human tongue. IQ scores and discrepancy data reveal

the scientific appeal of numbers and the desire to capture the abstract essence of the gifted underachiever. Hence, as a gifted underachiever, Cindy is defined not as *who* she is but by *what* she is *not*.

Taylor (1991), a noted Canadian philosopher, writes about the development of a malaise of the human spirit which seems to be linked to the current hegemony of psychological approaches to understanding our world and which have led to the primacy of theory and instrumental reason. There is, Taylor states, the belief that "we should seek technological solutions even when something very different is called for" (p. 6). The at-risk label carries real-life consequences for children. There is a silence at the heart of this almost clinical approach to giftedness-at-risk, a silence that discloses an emptiness, a sense of loss, and alienation. In recalling Otto's (1990) lamentation of the demystification of the human heart, Otto celebrates the work of a few researchers who seek not to depoeticize the heart but to rehumanize it. This interpretive inquiry seeks to keep a finger on the pulse of lived experience and legitimate the mystery and wonder of giftedness-at-risk. What hermeneutics offers is a way of drawing closer to life in gifted education.

The Spirit of Risk in the World

What is the relationship between giftedness and risk? It is easy to pass over the

preposition "at" in this phrase. "At" seems inconsequential in comparison to the words "giftedness" and "risk." The function of "at," however, is to link the two words together in a coincident-contingent relationship. The relationship brings to the forefront one voice that cautions that where there is risk there is always danger. This voice informs us that being-at-risk opens us to negative possibility for giftedness. But coincidence and contingency also opens a dialogical space for a different voice. This other voice agrees that being-at-risk makes us vulnerable, but being-vulnerable both opens us to danger from an encounter with the unknown and opens us to delight from exciting new possibilities of that encounter. In this way, the coincidence-contingency relationship reveals the challenge of multivocity in talking about this topic. The meaning of giftedness-at-risk is ambiguous. This ambiguity, moreover, is not a problem in need of a technological fix but is rather a dynamic invitation for dialogue. This underscores that the meaning of giftedness-at-risk is not settled and closed, but remains open and unsettling.

When coincidence and contingency enter the conversation, talk turns to the *haps* in life. Hap, the unexpected that comes to greet us in life is the quintessential hermeneutic moment. A hap, Weinsheimer (1985) notes, "makes its presence felt when one happens onto something, in the haphazard guess, the happenstance situation, in happiness and haplessness...for better or worse, hap cannot be avoided" (p. 8). Gadamer (1989) speaks about haps as the things which *just happen* in life behind our

backs and beyond our willing and doing but which, nevertheless, call for a response. The original hap is the happy event of being born into this world in the first place. One does not earn or deserve one's life. The gift of life is freely given to every person and freely received. The gift of life is a "godsend." A hap, however, is an opportunity for those who recognize it as a gift. That means being open to happenstance by giving oneself over to the creative spirit of risk, expecting the unexpected that erupts through the calm and opens the way to adventure in life. Becoming gifted requires making one's own the possibilities that living in the world presents.

Hap is the root of the word happiness. The Greek word for happiness is *eudaimonia*, and it refers to the *eu*, or well-being, of a *daimon*, a deity who is responsible for what happens to us. In ancient Greek and Roman literature, what happens to a person is inextricably connected to a daimon who is associated with each person at birth. The class of deities to which these daimons belong is called *genius*. Genius can best be translated as the inspiration which discloses the haps in life which are the portals to either fortune or misfortune in human affairs.

We do not live in a perfect world. The ancient Greeks recognized the play and playfulness of the mischievous spirit of risk in the world and named that spirit, Hermes. Hermes is "a specific quality in the nature, achievements and life patterns of [hu]mankind, as well as of the corresponding traits of roguery to be found on the surface of...[the] world" (Kerenyi, 1976, p. iv). From the Greek standpoint, the reality that is

Hermes honors the totality of human life in both its commendable and condemnable aspects. Kerenyi emphasizes that the Greeks saw a world in the god and the god in the whole world. Kerenyi calls this reality the "Hermes-world." In this paper, the Hermes-world is a metaphor for gifted education where the spirit of risk in the world reveals positive and negative possibilities for becoming gifted. The task of the Hermes-world metaphor is to make the familiar world of education strange and to make the strange familiar.

The etymology of the word "student" opens a portal to the Hermes-world. Gilligan, Rogers, and Brown (1990) point to the need "to wash our language of the layers of theory collected upon it, and to restore root meanings of ideas" (p. 319). Recovering some of the history of the word "student" makes it possible to get in touch with the world from which the word emerged and with which it still has living ties. In the *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED), a 600-year-old source records, "He (Mercurius) makep men studients in science of numbris and loueris perof." Mercurius is the Latin name for the Greek god Hermes. To see the familiar "student" linked together with the alien "Hermes" gives one pause.

According to the OED, a "student" is a person who is "engaged in" or "addicted to" study. To "engage" means to "pledge" oneself, to enter into a covenant or formal undertaking, such as education. Engagement indicates a deliberate entry into a contract where one's services are secured as a disciple in that undertaking, as a student is a

disciple of his or her teacher. The root of "engage" can be traced through Medieval English to the Old French derivative for "gage," something deposited as security or a stake, and to "wage" that underscores the gamble, or wager that always comes with being engaged in something (Partridge, 1983; Funk, 1978). Thus, being engaged in study is always both an investment and a roll of the Hermes dice, for with any engagement there is always risk.

The 400-year-old meaning of "addict" is to be "formally assigned by decree, made over, bound, devoted to another, as in consecrated to a god." In a nineteenth century reference, addict refers "to one attached to a pursuit or habitually inclined to a practice." The word "practice" draws attention to being-a-student as a way of life. In addition, Funk (1978) observes that the root of addict is the Latin, *dict*, "to say." In Greek myth, Hermes is the creator of the arts of language and in this way adds voice and dialogue to being-a-student. But being addicted is not a matter entirely decided by the addict; addiction is not a property of the addict. Addiction is a dialogue in which the "other" has a say; the "other" demands a hearing. Hence, to be addicted is to be addicted to an "other" who takes possession of one just as surely as one possesses the other. A student is swept up in a way of life that is both promise and possession. Becoming educated is an adventure, a journey through the mysterious Hermes-world.

To open the door to hermeneutics is to find oneself at home in language. What follows is a brief interpretation of two portals of opportunity that emerge in dialogues

between Cindy, the student identified earlier in this paper as a gifted underachiever, and her teachers. The term "opportunity" derives from the Latin word *portus* which originally meant a gate, door, or passage (Partridge, 1983). Hermes is called the "gate-keeper," the one who swings the gate open to positive possibilities or to negative possibilities in the life-world. Talking with teachers is risky, and bringing to light both the negative and positive possibilities of the pedagogical relationship can contribute to our understanding differently the meaning of gifted education.

The Common Sense of Dialogue

In ancient Greece, statues of Hermes, or *hermae*, were placed at the gate or entrance to a house where visitors were received, in the marketplace, and at crossroads or some other natural boundary point where strangers meet. Dialogue is a way of perpetually living with others at the boundary of the familiar and the strange. There is no possibility of genuine conversation without making oneself vulnerable, stepping into the open, and dropping one's guard. In the following excerpt, Cindy talks about the difficulty of engaging in dialogue with some teachers and discloses how the trust and disclosure that are necessary for the pedagogical relationship can also set students up to lose possibilities for giftedness.

C: Oh, it's not easy at all. I never have. I don't think I ever will.

B: Why not?

C: (pause)

B: You've got some pretty definite ideas about–

C: I've had all year to think about them.

B: Why wouldn't you talk to teachers about what is best for you?

C: Well, most of the teachers are very unapproachable. Even if you don't understand something sometimes it's very hard to approach them and ask them without...like Miss D., if you didn't understand something she would make you come ask her but when, if you, like, you are almost scared to go ask her.

B: What happened if you did go and ask for help? Is this Science we are talking about?

C: Yeah. She would um...um...she would like uh-uh-uh, I don't know. Like, "I knew you needed help." And she would make it very public. Like, she would embarrass you if you did need help.

In Cindy's words, the teacher "bags" at the students:

C: She'd get really upset, like, "I'm really surprised you got this mark." Or something. "The marks you're getting, you shouldn't be wasting your time like this. Go study or something." And right in front of the class, it gets kind of embarrassing. Like, it only happened to me once or twice but...

B: So, she does it in public.

C: Yeah. To embarrass you. To motivate you to do better.

B: Embarrass you because...

C: She wants you to do better.

B: She figures that will do the trick?

C: I don't really think it does through because, like, she embarrassed you so you...she lowered your self-esteem. Like if your self-esteem is lowered so is your motivation. And then, like, if you don't have any self-esteem, we don't want to do anything. You don't have any desire and so you just kinda stop. And what she thinks is that, like that if she, like, says, "You are bad at this; you've got to work" and stuff and starts being really rude to make you mad, you'll want to do better. I don't really think that will make you mad and want to do better. I think that would just make you mad and just grumble to yourself. I don't think it motivates you to do better.

Cindy reveals a portal of opportunity that opens to negative possibilities for becoming the best one can be. The possibilities of ontological giftedness in science are lost to Cindy. In this exchange, it is her own strengths and weaknesses that are the object of the teacher's attention, rather than the difficulty with the science content that prompted Cindy's call for help.

To conduct a dialogue means to allow oneself to be conducted by the topic to

which the partners in conversation are directed. A genuine dialogue always takes place between subjects; a subject-to-subject conversation about a shared topic of interest. In the following excerpt Cindy's math teacher takes the initiative in opening a genuine dialogue.

C: Some teachers, it depends which ones, if you've got a good teacher they will go over it with you until you understand.

B: When do they go over this material with your? During class, after school?

C: Well if you needed extra help you come after school. But sometimes my math teacher would have to approach me. Like, I didn't realize I needed help sometimes. He would come to me and go, "Well I've been kind of noticing from the results of your homework, or something, that you're not understanding this and this."

Cindy's initial silence is a calling for help, a calling that is heard and responded to by her math teacher. In the current ethos of professionalism, we do not frequently refer to teaching as a calling, a vocation. It is interesting to note that vocation has the same root, *voce*, as provocation and evocation. Van Manen (1982) observes that answering the call acknowledges a sense of acting pedagogically in the "personal becoming of the child" (p. 289). The calling of students challenges teachers to realize the ontological dimension of teaching. In this dialogue, the topic of the conversation is the math content and the purpose of the dialogue is the movement of teacher and student toward a

shared understanding of the situation. The math teacher is attuned to Cindy, on the same wave length, and he hears a discord before she does. He guides Cindy past the boundaries of the known into what is not-yet-known about math.

In the Greek epics, Hermes is called the "common guide" for all to whom life is an adventure. "Common" emphasizes the equality that is necessary in a dialogical relationship. The teacher-student dialogue, Diaz observes, is "a horizontal pedagogical relationship in which all are considered capable to give and receive; they are all are masters and disciples...It is no longer a vertical relationship in which the teacher monopolizes knowledge and decisions" (in Butt, 1989, p. 147). Developing a sense of the common is closely connected with judgment: "Common sense is exhibited primarily in making judgments about right and wrong, proper and improper...a demand that has to be made of all" (Gadamer, 1989, p. 32). Judgment shares the same Latin root as addict, *dict*, "to say." Judgment requires dialogue, talking with others, becoming aware of particularities, testing different positions, and taking a stand. From the time of Aristotle, good judgment has been regarded as practical wisdom and accepted as the *genius* of daily living.

Making the Curriculum live

Dialogue is ontological in bringing curriculum to life. What a living curriculum

means can be explored through Cindy's message for teachers: "Be enthusiastic." Cindy says that her best teacher was a language arts teacher who "put enthusiasm in her work and stuff." To be enthusiastic means to be "inspired" or "possessed by a god." In the Homeric myths Hermes is the "guide of souls" who leads the dead souls to the underworld but who also awakens souls from the death of the spirit. Thus, the Hermetic spirit is both generative and regenerative.

Jung (1967) points out that Hermes was originally a "wind god," the inspiration who "makes the souls to breathe" (p. 212). Breathing life into curriculum by "making the text speak" (Gadamer, 1989, p. 377) is a way of understanding how the ideas of others are a living gift that ontologically transforms one's own being. What a living gift of curriculum means emerges in an understanding of the teacher as storyteller (Jardine & Clandinin, 1987). The teacher as storyteller, according to Jardine and Clandinin, gives voice to what is considered to be most true and significant in a story that emerges "as part of the meaning in which the child, the teacher, and the class already live...out of the living history of the class" (p. 477). This story, they point out, is essentially dialogical rather than monological, not *his* or *her* story but *our* story. The teacher is aware of the mutual understanding that develops between teacher and students in the day-to-day working of the group, where it is going and where it should be going. Giving voice to that story vitalizes the curriculum.

Students and teachers journeying together through the Hermes-world reveal a

moral undertaking that requires the arts of living together. When people set out together on a journey, Kerenyi (1976) notes, they cross the rigid boundaries of *mine* and *yours* to *ours*. The relationship of the travellers honors the "alterity," the fundamental *otherness*, of the dialogue partners. Nancy (1990) notes that "the voice of each is singular...that is the singularity of *my* voice, of *yours*, and *our* dialogue" (p. 245). In other words, the dialogue is a synergy that honors the integrity of the individual voices in reaching a unity of meaning.

Gadamer (1989) uses the term "incarnation" in talking about what he calls the "miracle of language" (p. 42) made living human flesh. His reference is to the Christian doctrine of the Word made flesh in Christ. In a hermeneutic exploration of medieval texts designed to clarify this challenging doctrine, Frank (1989) argues that the incarnation drew a circle that includes divine and human within the image of "human family." The words "family" and "familiar" share the same root. According to Frank, by virtue of the incarnation we are all familiar, all humankind is part of the same spiritual family and distance is dissolved. The event of incarnation makes intense and particular demands on the student-teacher relationship. The doctrine announces an ontological relationship in which the teacher, *in loco parentis*, shares the same story with the students; it lives in them both.

In the next excerpt, Cindy talks about a different kind of storytelling that sets a negative tone for the possibilities of the value clarification aspect of the social studies

curriculum.

C: He would bring his guitar sometimes and he would play for us. Or play CDs and stuff. But the rest of the time he would tell us about, he'd get us a movie about what it was like in jail and stuff like that. Like, he's never been in there but he's met some people who have been in there. And all his friends are, like, "he's been arrested 142 times" or something like that. And like how he saved this one person off from drugs and stuff like that. And...

C: He did this in class. Like, this is what his *topic* would be. Like, about how he was and how he kept his cool when other people made him mad and stuff. This was the *topic* of all his classes.

B: I see.

C: Like, "Did I ever tell you the story where Bll-bll-bll," you know.

B: If you were going to make some recommendations you would tell teacher to cut out the stories about themselves?

C: Yeah. Actually it was kind of fun but, like, for half the year. And the other half it got really boring. Then nobody ever *respected* him anymore.

B: Because you weren't learning things?

C: Yeah.

"Respect," according to the OED, means "to turn around and look back at"

someone or something in admiration. Respect comes from the same root as "expect." Students have certain expectations about curriculum, that is, they "look forward to" the subject matter within the dialogical relationship. In Cindy's case, however, the circular play of respect-expect in the classroom reveals a monologue. In a monologue a speaker turns inward, excluding the others. The students not only experience a sense of no longer belonging together but also experience a feeling of loss in the lifelessness of curriculum. In this instance, the curriculum does not live in teacher or student but is dead knowledge.

The "central problem of all education" writes Whitehead, is "the problem of keeping knowledge alive, of preventing it from becoming inert" (p. 214). The lifelessness of curriculum in Cindy's dialogue resonates with what Whitehead (1970) refers to as the "dung-hill of inert ideas" (p. 222). It is possible, Whitehead argues, for students to acquire knowledge that can be repeated but which does not become part of the student. The danger of inert ideas, Whitehead cautions, is a mental dryrot that destroys the genius of the human mind.

Language is ontological in its generative nature. The connection between the fertile nature of Hermes and the fertilizer of dead ideas is an ontological moment. Hermes is a chthonian spirit whose underworldliness discloses the earthly cycle of the growth of new life from old. Jardine (1990) writes about the human connection with the Earth and its "*humus*, its living, generative character" (p. 214) from which humanity has

emerged. The intimate web of connections that joins humanity, fertility, and generativity reminds us that the so-called objective facts and figures that students must learn are actually the humus of lived experience which can generate something new from within itself.

Conclusion

In its desire to be the science of the mind, psychology strives for objective truth with the intention of making human inquiry as rigorous as that of the natural sciences. In the natural sciences: "Modern science has been praised for eliminating humors, devils, angels, demons, mystic forces, and animism by proving rational explanations of natural phenomenon (Kline, 1982, p. 337-338)." Much is made of the rigor of psychological research. Rigor is an interesting word. In the OED rigor denotes "logical accuracy or exactitude." Rigor derives from the Latin where it was used to describe a "severity of life," an "austerity, strictness, and exactness without allowance, latitude, or indulgence." It describes a "harshness" and "intensity of atmospheric cold" such as the rigors of winter. Rigor also describes the "unyielding stiffness of death."

What is needed is a way of moving closer to life in gifted education. The "antithesis of all objectivism," writes Gadamer (1989), is the life-world...the whole in which we live as historical creatures" (p. 247). The remarkable success of the

psychological paradigm overwhelms gifted education. When we reduce the mystery of giftedness to an abstract theoretical concept and eliminate risk through a diagnosis of needs with prescribed interventions, there is a "demagicification of the world" (Gadamer, 1989, p. 51). When the life-world of education loses some of its magic, the students and teachers who are at home in that world suffer a loss by losing touch with that richness in life. The *daimons* of giftedness-at-risk becomes silenced and we become heedless of that silence. Hermeneutics, by way of contrast, regards a topic like giftedness-at-risk as a mystery in need of evocative interpretation. This paper offered the metaphor of the esoteric Hermes-world as a way of exploring positive and negative possibilities for giftedness that present themselves in the riskiness of the pedagogical dialogue.

There is hubris in attempts to control the Trickster or to eliminate the riskiness that is a distinctive feature of the wholeness of human lived experience. The riskiness of life erupts as *haps*, the haplessness or happiness that life presents. A hap is an opportunity for ontological giftedness--to change ourselves by becoming the best we can be. Risk is not something to be overcome, controlled, or assuaged. Risk requires a surrendering. We live in a wonderfully risky world and the spirit of risk guides us to constantly go beyond who we actually are to live in our potentiality for who are becoming. Gifted education can be understood differently as a way of dwelling in possibilitities for giftedness. The adventure of becoming gifted exists as a permanent positive *human* possibility for all students, regardless of individual differences in genetic

or acquired properties.

Notes

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